STUDY PROJECT

SOLDIERS AND LEGISLATORS: A COMMON MISSION

BY

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The author conducted a series of interviews with professional staff members of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees, as well as with military congressional liaison officers to gain insights into the legislative process. The article concludes by recommending four guidelines for military officers when working with legislators: first, keep the military-political relationship in perspective; second, be open and frank in personal dealings with legislators; third, respect the legislative process; fourth, maintain a complementary relationship between Congress and the Defense Department by exchanging active and retired personnel. Legislators and soldiers share the responsibility to maintain the national defense.

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SOLDIERS AND LEGISLATORS: A COMMON MISSION

An Individual Study Project
Intended for Publication

by

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The author conducted a series of interviews with professional staff members of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees, as well as with military congressional liaison officers to gain insights into the legislative process. The article concludes by recommending four guidelines for military officers when working with legislators: first, keep the military-political relationship in perspective; second, be open and frank in personal dealings with legislators; third, respect the legislative process; fourth, maintain a complementary relationship between Congress and the Defense Department by exchanging active and retired personnel. Legislators and soldiers share the responsibility to maintain the national defense.

Two hundred years ago, Alexis de Tocqueville commented on the unique relationship between the American people and their government. "In democratic eyes, government is not a blessing," he wrote, "but a necessary evil."[1] Americans today would heartily concur. They have traditionally mistrusted politicians and the "big" government they symbolized. In a recent Harris poll, 53% of the Americans queried said that Congressmen were not effectively fulfilling their responsibilities.[2] In a 1989 Gallup Poll, only 32% of those polled expressed "quite a lot" of confidence in Congress as an institution. For the past several years, Congress has consistently ranked near the bottom of major institutions in public confidence.[3]

If asked, soldiers would probably echo the sentiments of their countrymen. To a much larger degree than their civilian counterparts, soldiers feel the impact of legislation. Laws dictate every facet of military service. Professional officers generally understand the need to control the expenditure of tax revenues. While they may disagree with the square footage allocated for living quarters or the authorized weight allowance for the shipment of household goods, they accept it with a sense of resignation and a touch of humor that marks military service.

What has increasingly begun to rankle the nation's military leaders is the growing propensity of Congress to micromanage their professional responsibilities. Last year Congress changed 60% of the line items in the Department of Defense's (DOD) budget request.[4] In effect it claimed that on 60% of everything the Pentagon wanted to manage, buy or develop, Congress knew a better way to do or not to do it. Congressional responsibilities stem from Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution which requires the legislature "to raise and support armies" and "to make rules for the government and regulation of the land and naval forces." As overseers, legislators in 1984 made 599,000 calls, sent 18,000 letters and demanded 719 reports from the military services.[5] This massive amount of oversight has engendered a deep frustration among the military's senior leadership. In a recent interview, Secretary of the Army, Michael Stone, flatly stated that Congressional micromanagement "makes an absolute mess out of what we (the Army) are doing here."[6] Secretary Richard Cheney, meanwhile, in his report to streamline the defense acquisition process, pointed out "the 30 committees, 77 subcommittees and four panels" with "overlapping and duplicative jurisdiction over DOD affairs."[7] Newspapers such as the Wall Street Journal have joined the growing ranks of critics by urging a public

Presidential campaign to stop Congressional meddling in military budgets.[8] At the heart of this debate lies the perception that Congressional tinkering benefits only a district or state while flagrantly harming the "national good".

Legislators and soldiers share a common mission. Both have the responsibility, in their own way, to maintain the national defense. But despite the massive amount of correspondence between the two institutions, serious misconceptions cloud many senior officers' understanding of Congress' role in national defense. Most officers can vaguely recall distant civics classes which describe the process by which a bill becomes a law. They are often unprepared to face the powerful clash of interests which form the modern legislative process. Military officers must be willing to shed their cynicism or their naivete and learn how they differ from legislators in constituency, methods of operating and professional ethic. By understanding the uniquely American legislative process and by appreciating the complex pressures on Congress, senior military leaders will more effectively contribute to the nation's defense.

Nowhere do legislators and soldiers differ as radically as in the constituency which they represent. Military officers have virtually no ties to their home districts or states. The

dictates of military service have moved them over the entire United States and often over the world. Ties to their place of birth become blurred with each new assignment. Legal residences reflect the size of state income taxes or home purchases. Climate and the presence of jobs, meanwhile, influence many a serviceman's retirement home.

Throughout their service, military officers view security issues from a national perspective. They see their nation as a competitor or ally of other nations not as a kaleidoscope of individual states, regions or interests. This global view, however, does not exempt admirals or generals from answering to powerful constituents. The armed forces exert a professional, emotional and financial hold over their members. Often these loyalties conflict with the positions of the Defense Department. Professional staff members who prepare legislation for members of the Armed Services Committees point out that the military establishment is not a monolith speaking with one voice. Even after the Secretary of Defense submits the President's budget to Congress, discordant voices flow through staff cubicles. Staff members claim that although the majority of service representatives loyally support the Department of Defense position, mavericks often appear pushing service programs or even separate branch programs within the services. In addition the reserves, national guard and

countless retired military "consultants" promote their respective point of view.[9]

After Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney assumed his position, he quickly served notice that he expected the service chiefs to sing in harmony with the DOD chorus. One of his first acts was to admonish the Air Force Chief of Staff, General Larry Welch, for overzealous "free-lancing" of Air Force programs on the Hill.[10] Later when Mr. Cheney slashed the V-22 Osprey, a hybrid airplane-helicopter ordered for the Marine Corps, from the 1990 budget some politicians questioned whether or not the cut would hold in the face of powerful service and industry opposition. "Don't ever underestimate the persuasiveness of the United States Marines," quipped Senator Sam Nunn, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, "it's amazing what 'a few good men' can do."[11]

Congressmen look at security issues from a far different perspective. They are painfully aware of the simple fact that voters elect representatives to look after their own interests, not someone else's. A legislator's report card often becomes the number of federal projects he or she has funneled into the home district or state. The more aggressive they are, the better. Senators and representatives even venture to the boundaries of ethical conduct in their zeal for so-called "pork

barrel" projects. Senator Alfonse M. D'Amato from New York, for example, recently came under scrutiny for allegedly improperly channelling Housing and Urban Development funds to his home state. Vigorously defending his right to go to "bat for every single thing that had merit," he promised to continue fighting for New York, insisting "that my state elected me to go for it".[12] When the Republican National Committee attempted to capitalize on the ethical difficulties of several democrats in 1989, their effort fell flat. "Republicans won't learn" claimed Democratic Congressional Campaign spokesman, Howard Schloss" that congressional elections are decided by local people on local issues."[13]

Obviously, not every national security issue before Congress has a local constituency. But even where hometown jobs are not affected, Political Action Committees or PACs exert a strong financial pull on congressmen. In 1988, over 3,500 national organizations had registered as PACS. They contributed over 148 million dollars to candidates in the 1988 Congressional elections. This amounted to almost a third of the nearly 476 million dollars raised by the candidates.[14] Washington observers point out that representatives who run for election every two years are more vulnerable to fund-raising concerns than senators who campaign every six years. "A representative never stops running," claimed one veteran Hill

staffer. "Every defense contractor or dedicated interest group within the representative's 500,000 voter constituency must be addressed." Senators, meanwhile, enjoy the advantage of more numerous interests spread over their entire state.

Interest groups need not be financially strong to make themselves heard. Civil rights groups, churches and minority organizations command large blocs of voters among a congressman's constituency. When the Reagan administration, for example, sought to sell the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) radar planes to Saudi Arabia in 1981, it was vigorously opposed by several American-Jewish organizations. One of them was the American Jewish Committee whose Washington representative, Hyman Bookbinder, explained his organization's strength: "What we have going for us, and that's really the essence of the Jewish lobby is an organized, committed, concerned Jewish community in America".[15] Unlike service representatives, Congressmen answer to a much larger and often contradictory constituency.

An excellent example of an issue with conflicting constituencies is the legislation mandating the sale of U.S. meat in military commissaries in Europe. At first glance, the meat issue appears to be a straight-forward case of pork barrel politics. From 1970 to 1987 per capita consumption of beef and

pork in the U.S. declined by 12% and 4% respectively.[16] In an effort to boost sales, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) in 1986 directed the Department of Defense to conduct a test in its European commissaries to determine whether fresh U.S. beef and pork could compete with its cheaper European raised counterparts. The six month test revealed that European meat outsold the U.S. product by a five to one ratio.[17] An accompanying survey pointed out that the price differential of nearly 50% between the European and American cuts of meat prompted the majority of customers to choose the European brands.[18] The study further indicated that it would cost the Defense Department 30-35 million dollars to handle, transport and build facilities for the exclusive sale of U.S. meat in its commissaries. After the conclusion of the test, Assistant Secretary of Defense Chapman Cox reported to the HASC that he did not believe "that legislation which would limit competition of meat products to U.S. products...would be in the best interests of the U.S. service member or U.S. taxpayer...!"[19]

With that reply the issue lay dormant until 1988 when the European Economic Community (EEC) dealt a major blow to the American rancher. It claimed that hormone treated beef, which constituted the vast majority of U.S. products, constituted a health hazard. Consequently, on January 1, 1988 it banned the

sale of hormone treated beef within the 12 nation community. At the same time, the EEC continued to subsidize the sale of over 60 million dollars of its beef to U.S. commissaries.[20] The subsidy allowed the American soldier to put a slightly less tender but much less costly slice of beef on the dinner table.

In Washington the EEC's latest salvo against American products raised cries for retaliation. In January 1989, the HASC again asked the Defense Department to study the impact of limiting meat purchases to U.S. sources. The services studied the issue and reported that if proposed legislation pertained only to beef rather than all meat products and if only the commissaries north of the Alps were included, the Defense Department could comply. DOD, however, requested an additional authorization of 10 million dollars for transportation costs.[21] One thorny question lingered. U.S. beef would still cost military families 35% or about 12 million dollars per year more than the European beef they were buying. Would the American serviceman have to pay an extra 12 million dollars to subsidize the American rancher in the trade war with the EEC?

An astute observer once described a statesman "as a politician who is held upright by equal pressure from all directions." [22] The beef war gave several politicians the opportunity to demonstrate their statesman like skills. Legislators showed their constituents as well as military

families their ability to compromise and to solve a complex issue. Professional staff members on the HASC got the process rolling by enlisting the support of the House Agriculture Committee. The latter agreed to provide 12 million dollars to subsidize the retail price of U.S. beef products on a sliding scale for the next three years.[23] Military families in Europe would gradually pay the same amount for American beef as their counterparts in the United States. The HASC further recommended the authorization of 10 million dollars for increased transportation costs. The beef issue sailed through the House with little debate.

The beef issue generated far more controversy in the Senate where Senator Tom Harkin from Indiana introduced a more ambitious amendment. The Harkin Amendment required all meat and meat products for the entire European theatre to be purchased from U.S. producers.[24] Senator Harkin also argued for the earmarking of 10 million dollars in the defense budget for transportation costs to cover his far-ranging proposal. Senator John McCain from Arizona quickly rose in opposition. The ensuing debate began at 1:15 in the morning when tempers were starting to flare. Senator Harkin pushed the earmarking provision realizing that it would restrict DOD's flexibility but guarantee the availability of transportation assets for

meat shipments. He asked if "$10 million is such a big ticket item that we cannot afford $10 million to assure that our troops in Europe have clean, wholesome meat out of the Defense Department budget? Give me a break! Out of $288 billion?"[25] Senator McCain countered by insisting that he could find "lots of uses for $10 million".[26] After a short recess, the two Senators agreed to let the Harkin Amendment stand but to cut out the earmarking restriction.

The modified Harkin amendment ended up in joint conference along with other measures on which the House and Senate disagreed. The joint conference consists of members of the HASC and Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) who have the tedious responsibility to resolve differences between their respective bills. The conferees compromised on this issue by restricting the ban to U.S. beef rather than all meat and by dropping the House language authorizing 10 million dollars for transportation costs.[27] Nearly everyone was satisfied. The cattle ranchers increased their sales, Congress fired another shot in the economic war against the EEC and servicemembers eventually would pay beef prices comparable to those paid by military families elsewhere. Congress forced DOD to pay for the new shipments "out of hide", but it allowed the department the flexibility to control the funds for transportation. The

U.S. taxpayer, meanwhile, contributed $14 million dollars to subsidize the beef war against the EEC. Even an ardent critic would be hard pressed to find fault with the outcome. Compromise, hard work, concern for constituents and the legislative process produced an amendment which provided the greatest good to the greatest number of citizens.

Although legislators and soldiers differ significantly in their respective constituencies, they carry out their responsibilities in much the same way. Military leaders are accustomed to giving and following orders. As officers advance in experience and maturity, however, their decision-making methods change as well. While orders are orders in any military organization, consensus building becomes an increasingly important skill at higher levels of command. A wise commander knows that although he can change his unit's operating procedures, he will achieve far better results if he incorporates the recommendations of his subordinates and technicians. In the Pentagon, officers soon realize that if they approach strategic or budgetary issues from a parochial view, they will only disrupt policymakers who attempt to find the best solution for the entire service. Ideally, as the various branches or components jostle for position and attempt

to persuade their superiors on the merits of their views, the best solution emerges. Congress is no different except that there is no higher authority who decides on policies.

In Congress 435 representatives and 100 senators answer only to their constituents. Consensus building, compromise, log-rolling, (exchanging votes for each other) and the allocation of influential positions form the "tools of the trade." The entire legislative system has become a lengthy, cumbersome and often inefficient consensus building process. Its major product, the federal budget, only emerges after prodigious effort. The budget's painful birth results from the numerous subcommittees and committees which assist its lengthy labor.

After the Secretary of Defense submits his portion of the budget to Congress in January, both the Senate and the House begin their scrutiny. The budget first travels to the Budget Committees. Established by the Budget Control Act of 1974, these committees attempt to solve one of Congress' chronic problems - overspending. The Budget Committees set ceilings and priorities for different categories of expenditures. After the Budget Committees complete their respective budget resolutions, they report them to the full House and full Senate. Following a floor debate on the resolutions, the

components move to the Authorization Committees for individual line item analysis. In the case of the Department of Defense, its bill travels to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees. Here fifty-four Congressmen and twenty Senators begin their simultaneous scrutiny. Assisted by a force of nearly eighty professional staff members, they attempt to mold defense expenditures within the limits and priorities established in the earlier budget resolution. In the past these committees kept "open authorizations" for most items allowing the Appropriation Committees to specify the amount spent on each item. Now, however, the Armed Services Committees specify the amounts and, at times, limit the time period for the expenditure.[28] Although the Armed Services Committees cannot require funding, their power lies in the publicity generated by their hearings and by their agreement with the Appropriations Committee under which the latter normally will not require the funding of an item not previously authorized.

The last committees to receive the bill are the Appropriations Committees. Traditionally, the Senate Appropriations Committee sits as an appeals board for federal agencies or special interest groups dissatisfied with the House's figures.[29] Inevitably, the Senate and House budgets differ, requiring a joint conference to resolve the differences

before the budget travels to the Oval Office for the President's signature. The precarious journey requires consensus building at each stage. It is important to remember that the ratio of Republicans to Democrats on the committees mirrors their relative ratios in the House and Senate. Along every step of the budget process, legislators work to garner the majorities needed to authorize or appropriate their desired item or policy. Rather than debate whether Congress slights the national interest in its zeal to promote hometown issues, military leaders might become more effective participants in the process of determining the national interest by examining another contentious issue in the 1990 budget process.

In April 1990, Secretary Cheney announced a series of measures to reduce the military budget. Included in his list of cuts was the F-14D fighter, the V-22 Osprey helicopter-airplane and the deactivation of a brigade of the 4th Infantry Division, Mechanized at Ft. Carson, Colorado. Appearing before the HASC the Secretary stated that the 4th Infantry Division remained the only heavy division in the United States which still retained three active combat brigades. Other heavy divisions with a reinforcement mission to NATO consisted of two active and one reserve or forward-deployed brigade. Despite this rationale, the loss of 3,300 soldiers generated tremendous

concern in the Division's hometown of Colorado Springs. Senators and congressmen soon began to echo their constituents' displeasure at the anticipated loss of jobs in a community where the military generated 250 million dollars in annual income.[30] At first, the Colorado legislators pushed for a delay of the deactivation contending that the cuts had not been studied in sufficient detail and that the Defense Department should first cut forces in NATO. While listening to these arguments, the Army's leadership pressed on with the deactivation which began in May and eventually ended in December. Unable to sway the policy makers in the Pentagon, Colorado legislators inquired about the possibility of "backfilling" the brigade with the 10th Special Forces Group from Ft. Devens, Massachusetts. When the powerful Massachusetts delegation learned of this attempt, they in turn, pressured the Army leadership to make no changes.[31] In early June, a "Colorado Springs Citizens Group" of leading citizens and retired general officers visited Washington to meet with key members of Congress, the Department of the Army and the Secretary of Defense's Office.[32]

These meetings allowed the constituents to express their feelings and gave the Colorado congressmen and senators the opportunity to show their constituents they were fighting on their behalf. Their combined efforts, however, proved fruitless as the deactivation continued.

Undaunted, the legislators turned their attention to the Authorization Committees. Representative Joel Hefley, a junior member of the Military Personnel and Compensation Subcommittee of the HASC, introduced an amendment to prevent the Army from deactivating the brigade in fiscal year 1990. Representative Hefley was unable to generate much enthusiasm from other Colorado congressmen or from fellow lawmakers. The Readiness Subcommittee wrote two" senses of Congress "into the budget bill suggesting that reductions be taken from European based units. A" sense of Congress" does not carry the force of law, but rather officially allows the member to articulate his views. The two senses of Congress remained in the bill as it moved to the full committee session and onto the floor.[33] On the Senate side, the Colorado delegation met with more success. Senator Tim Wirth, a liberal Democrat, took the lead by raising the Ft. Carson issue before the SASC. There he proposed an amendment which would prohibit the Army from deactivating the brigade until the completion of a Total Force Policy Study on December 1, 1990. With strong support from Senator Nunn, Senator Wirth won unanimous approval of his amendment. Inserted in the wording of the Senate version of the budget, the Nunn-Wirth Amendment met no opposition on the Senate floor.[34] Backed by his amendment, Senator Wirth called

upon the Secretary of the Army to halt the ongoing stand down of troops and tanks. Secretary Stone refused. Calling efforts to save the 2nd Brigade "parochial measures", he stressed that a halt to the process now would "cause turbulence and personal hardship for our soldiers and their families, and ... ultimately undo what has been done."[35] In early October, the differences between the House and Senate budget bills ended up in joint conference. Since the House version contained only a sense of Congress on the deactivation, while the Senate version was actually written into the budget, the deactivation issue was thrown in the laps of the joint conferees. At this point the Army leadership used every opportunity to inform the conferees about the necessity to continue the deactivation.

Regulations allow the military services to provide Congress with information concerning the President's Budget. This responsibility to provide information and answer questions gives military liaison officers and senior military leaders access to legislators. The line between providing information and lobbying is a fine one. Some professional staff members scoff at the idea that the services don't lobby, but they all highly value service representatives' opinions and information. In the Ft. Carson case, the Army leadership from

the top down hastened to explain the rationale behind the ongoing deactivation to members of the joint conference. The Army also opened the door for support from legislators from Oregon and Idaho by announcing that the 4th Infantry's new reserve brigade would come from these states.[36] While the joint conferees debated the various issues on which the House and Senate differed, the brigade continued turning in its vehicles and reassigning its soldiers. By October the cost to reactivate the largely defunct brigade approached the 400 million dollar mark. In the end, the Nunn-Wirth Amendment disappeared in joint conference and the bill that emerged made no mention of it.

A number of factors contributed to its demise. First, the Defense Department and the Army presented strong rationale for the brigade's deactivation and vigorously defended its authority to deactivate. Second, the Colorado delegation, especially on the House side, failed to build a strong consensus for the amendment. Conspicuously absent from the debate on the issue was Colorado Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder, a Democrat and chairperson of the powerful Military Installations and Facilities Subcommittee of the HASC. If the Republicans and Democrats from Colorado had closed ranks they would have been a more formidable force. On the Senate side,

Senator Wirth's strong stand to maintain conventional forces undoubtedly drew a skeptical response from fellow lawmakers who were aware of his voting record on defense issues.[37] Third, despite the Nunn-Wirth Amendment, the Secretary of Defense continued the deactivation so that by the time the issue reached the joint conference the brigade was virtually stood down. The Colorado delegation failed to micromanage the Defense Department's program.

The legislative process has its own system of checks and balances. Members of Congress differ in political outlook, party affiliation, regional outlook, special interests and friendships. If an amendment, such as Senator Wirth's fails to complete its laborious journey through the maze of subcommittees, committees and joint conferences, it is because it failed to rally support across party and regional lines. As the nation approaches a period of significant defense cutbacks, the pressure to eliminate "pork barrel" projects is rising dramatically.

During the 1990 budget hearings, Representative Les Aspin, chairman of the HASC took great pride in keeping out most of his fellow representatives' pet projects which totaled 6.8 billion dollars. "There's no room for even the deserving add-ons", he stated, "let alone the ones that go 'oink'".[38] The

responsibility to trim the fat and not the muscle of national defense rests with the Congress. If the military professional presents a strong rationale for his view, fits it into a strategic framework and supports it with a realistic threat environment, he must realize that he has accomplished his mission.

Even if officers understand the legislative process, they often feel uneasy working in a political environment. General Dwight D. Eisenhower's attitude about politics reflects those of many senior leaders today. In 1943 he confided to a friend his feelings regarding the political maneuvers of allied leaders. "In fact" he wrote, "once this war is over, I hope never again to hear the word 'politics'".[39] These ironic words flowed from the pen of the man whom the American people would elect to the presidency nine years later. Another war hero, General Douglas MacArthur, spoke in a similar vein to the cadets assembled at West Point in 1962. "Let civilian voices argue the merits of demerits of our process of government", he intoned, listing the ills of deficit financing, Federal paternalism, power groups, politics, crime and morals. "These great national problems are not for your professional participation or military solution."[40] These words came from the officer who directed the political, economic and social

reconstruction of Japan after World War II.

Today, the defense portion of the budget consumes 25% of the nation's tax dollar and the defense establishment employs 61% of all federal employees and 5.3% of the national labor force. The Defense Department's policies and budgets affect the national deficit, inflation and unemployment. Decisions on base closures, weapons purchases and enlistment policies directly impact on millions of Americans. If voters are disadvantaged by policies from Washington, they will appeal to their elected representatives. Legislators dislike explaining personal hardships to their constituents especially if a "bureaucrat" caused the predicament. When Senator Alan Dixon from Illinois fought the closure of Chanute Air Force Base he assailled Congress' favorite whipping boy. "It would be an outrage", he exclaimed, "if a fine community of 20,000 people in my state were torn asunder because of mistakes made by the government - by faceless, nameless people who have nothing to answer to."[42] Representative Les Aucoin from Oregon expressed a similar bias when he described Secretary Cheney's chances for success on the Hill, "...he'll have a lot more credibility than some intellectual yahoo who's never been elected to anything."[43] By training, military officers believe "politics"

is something to avoid while many legislators ridicule the federal employee who never faces the rigors of an election. Both prejudices inhibit the orderly functioning of government. Military officers must accept the occasional role they will be forced to play by distraught legislators.

In order to equip, man and support an effective fighting force, the senior leader must step off the moral high ground when dealing with Congress. If officers understand the national impact of their decisions, they will realize that the best military solution to a national security issue may not be politically possible. A service, for example, may wish to terminate a production run of a particular article, such as wet weather clothing. Legal provisions may exist for such a decision, but Congress may feel that the lost jobs and income in an economically deprived region outweigh the savings generated. They may dictate, therefore, that the service buy the additional clothing. The service in turn, may object by pointing out more pressing needs for its funds. Assuming that the gear meets quality standards, does the service's or the region's priorities best serve the "national good"? Of course, not every item of contention between the Department of Defense and Congress falls into the category of competing priorities. In some cases, military leaders may simply make poor decisions.

Many senior military leaders assigned to the Pentagon are surprised to find legislators and staff members who are very knowledgeable about military hardware and policies. Senators and congressmen often hold strong ideas about the nation's defense needs and they enjoy the experience of wrestling with the same issues year after year. Representative Marvin Leath from Texas, a twelve year veteran who served in the Army from 1954 to 1956 rejects the idea that the HASC rubber-stamps the Pentagon's requests. "Some of us have been in the defense business longer than (Cheney) has" he insists.[44] Senator Stevens with 19 years experience on defense issues is even more outspoken.

> "I view the Department of Defense as management of a portion of a large corporation, and I serve on the board of directors... I feel that I and other members here who have a long continuum with dealing with some of these problems have a little bit more understanding of the process than the people who are just passing through desks in the Pentagon."[45]

Backing up these veterans of the budget wars is a constantly growing, well-paid and highly educated professional committee staff.

Committee staffers, in contrast to a legislator's personal staff are older (average age, 40) and possess advanced degrees (63%) particularly, law degrees.[46] Many have previous

government experiences in the Congressional Budget Office or in the executive branch. Their numbers in recent years have soared. In 1960 the HASC employed 15 staff members; in 1985 it had 64 on its payroll. In the Senate Armed Services Committee, meanwhile, professional staff members grew from 23 to 48.[47] In addition to the committee staff, lawmakers are supported by legislative assistants. Each of these assistants orients his efforts to a committee on which the legislator sits. As a result of these staff increases, legislators possess considerable expertise on major defense issues and procurements. As the congressional staff grows in number, experience and expertise, military leaders can only benefit from establishing a close working relationship with them. Congressmen face historic foreign policy challenges, sizable defense cuts and rising domestic needs. When interests clash, accurate information and a clear vision of future requirements become vital for decision-makers.

Senior military leaders must realize that the service secretaries play a key role in dealing with Congress. The service secretaries are responsible to the Secretary of Defense and act as a buffer between the military priorities of the men and women in uniform and the political priorities of members of Congress. Nothing could be more disastrous for the nation than

military leaders who make recommendations based primarily on political expediency. The service secretaries, along with the Secretary of Defense, constantly interact with Congress and bear much of the burden of sweetening the bitter news of base closures and production cutbacks. Their insight and political savvy allow military leaders to concentrate on recommending the most appropriate military course of action while the secretaries, who are political appointees, weigh the political considerations. Complex issues are never black and white. The stationing of newly formed divisions or the homeporting of naval vessels carry significant economic benefits to a region. Typically any number of locations could be acceptable from a military perspective. But demographic, economic or politically partisan factors will favor one region over another. The balancing act of competing priorities lies within the secretaries' responsibilities. No one in Washington or among the American public wants officers to become "political animals." But a willingness to appreciate conflicting interests, to compromise and to respect the legislative process will allow the senior officer to help shape national policy. Uniformed leaders must resist the temptation to make a moral issue of what may be a practical problem. Whether an

officer is assigned to the nation's capital or to a less visible post, he or she will eventually come in contact with congressmen and their staff. As senior officers seek to develop their ability to participate in national policymaking, these deceptively basic concepts may be useful.

1. Keep the military-political relationship in perspective. Legislators make many statements for the benefit of their constituents regardless of their personal beliefs. Public servants, such as the military, periodically become publicized whipping boys for national problems. After all is said and done, today's armed forces are better equipped, manned and supported than anytime in U.S. history. One Hill staffer with over 12 years in the land systems procurement business put it this way: "Over the past several years, the Army has received 98% of everything it asked for." A quick check of the major defense programs in the 1990 budget reveals that the services got pretty much what they wanted. Out of 35 major programs, the Defense Department received at least 90% of funds requested for 24 programs. An additional 4 projects benefitted from appropriated monies which were not requested.[48]

2. Be open and professional in personal dealings with legislators. While the task of daily contact with the Hill staff and elected officials rests with each service's legislative liaison division, institutional attitudes make a big difference in lawmakers' perception of the military.

Representative Dave McCurdy from Oklahoma, in a recent compliment to Secretary Cheney, described the qualities which lawmakers look for in the defense community. "In politics," McCurdy claims, "perception is 99 percent of reality and Dick is the ultimate perception of reasonableness: controlled, paced, rational."[49] Military commanders must realize that military authorizations and appropriations are no longer controlled by a handful of senior Southern legislators. Defense issues interest all elected officials. Whether officers are dealing with the chairman of Senate Armed Services Committee or a junior representative's staff member, they deserve courteous, frank and strictly professional advice.

3. Understand and respect the legislative process. Other than the knowledge gained from civics classes and a smattering of American history, many officers remain blissfully unaware of the military's role in the legislative process. Regardless of where they serve, it is imperative that they understand the Constitutional responsibilities of the Congress. Senior service schools should stress the Constitutional fundamentals of civil-military relations. Senior leaders should also encourage their subordinates to learn about the government, to visit their congressmen in Washington and to write their representatives about service issues which affect them.

Numerous improvements in the quality of life for servicemembers such as daycare construction and variable housing allowances have resulted from the personal involvement of senators and congressmen with soldiers and their families.

4. Maintain a complementary relationship between Congress and the Defense Department. The task of consensus building is not limited to the halls of Congress. The wheels of government turn more smoothly when each part of the machine moves in concert with the others. It is not without good reason that Presidents often choose prominent legislators to head the Defense Department. These lawmakers normally bring their personal staff members across the Potomac with them. In recent years, experienced professional staff members have assumed key positions within the defense establishment. Retired military officers, meanwhile, have found employment on the Hill either as legislative assistants or professional staff members. In either case, public servants who have worked both sides of an issue can more easily appreciate and, hopefully, cooperate to achieve the best results. A major detractor from this practice is legislation which prohibits regular officers from drawing full retirement pay if they work for Congress. Instead

of taking advantage of the experience and knowledge of retired officers, "double-dipper" laws drive them into the private sector or early retirement.

Few decades in American history will match the challenges of the 90's. A diminishing threat from the Soviet Union, emerging democracies in Eastern Europe and instability in other parts of the world will combine with pressing domestic needs to alter the profile of America's fighting forces.

As military officers rise in rank and assume greater responsibility for the national defense, they cannot allow cynicism, ignorance or naivete to hinder their cooperation with the nation's legislators. They share a common and sacred mission.

ENDNOTES

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23. Interview with Mr. Karl Schneider.

24. Meat products are defined as items with more than 2% meat.

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26. Ibid.

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